

EMIGRE Nº19: Starting From Zero

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PRÉ N°19:

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Cranbrook
Henk Elenga
John Weber
Keith Robert-
son

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CORPORATION



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INTERROGATION

Each time we bring an issue of *Emigre* to the printer, the idea for the next will have slowly started to surface, but never quite crystallizes until we're almost finished.

The idea for this issue started to come together after I was invited to do a three-day workshop at Cranbrook Academy of Art in Bloomfield Hills, Michigan.

I have always been impressed by the graphic design work produced there, mostly because of the students' high level of risk taking and experimentation. Regardless of the methodologies used (some far more interesting than what is expressed in the work), it is their sheer energy and sincere interest in graphic design as a creative discipline that I am attracted to. And although not everything they produce is of the same quality (some work I find downright ugly), the work usually manages to offer something new, raise questions or make me laugh.

Over the past eight or nine issues, *Emigre* has often featured work by Cranbrook students and alumni alike. *Emigre* #910, published in 1989, was designed, written and produced entirely by the graduate design students.

Just recently a young undergraduate design student from a large university somewhere in the Midwest called me. He had picked up an my bias towards Cranbrook and asked me whether I thought that any of these "convention-and-rule-breaking students at Cranbrook" were ever concerned about contributing in a "positive" way to our culture, instead of always breaking rules. He seemed both mad and frustrated. Mad, I believe, perhaps because he didn't understand this type of work and frustrated (I found out later) because the school he attended left little room for such personal expression. After suggesting that he should address his question directly to the Cranbrook students, I did feel a need to inform him that, in my eyes, rule-breaking per se was not the goal. I told him that these graphic designers were trying to find their personal voice and were simply intrigued by the never-ending search for alternative ways to communicate visually and verbally. What better place to do this than in a graduate design program? I also mentioned that he should remember that the conventions and rules that exist within graphic design are not exactly carved in stone and that it is valid to question the necessity of these rules or at least wonder about how and why these rules were established in the first place. Graphic design is not like architecture, where, for example, if you don't follow certain regulations, a building might collapse and kill people.

This doesn't mean that anything goes in graphic design. In the end, it is the designer's goal to communicate messages. But simple common sense is as good a rule to abide by as any. After my conversation with this student, I decided that this issue of *Emigre* should be devoted to

graphic designers who experiment — designers who are fascinated by the idea of what graphic design would be like if we didn't adhere to the existing rules. It would be an iconoclastic issue. "Why do we experiment?" would be the million dollar question.

However, during my three days at Cranbrook, another interesting notion came into the picture. Whenever the question arose of what the future of graphic design had in store, the students expressed a need to return to simpler, more direct ways of expression. This need had come partially as a reaction to ten years of very intense experimentation with complex typographic and pictorial structuring at Cranbrook (beautifully elaborated upon and illustrated in the recently published book *Cranbrook Design: The New Discourse*). The current students, though, felt a need to take inventory and start with a clean slate. Such a reaction sounded familiar. After creating some of the most unconventional (rule-breaking) page layouts for the British *The Face* magazine, Neville Brody eventually returned to the very basics of graphic design or, as Keith Robertson writes in the following article, "the safe refuge of the International Style." When visiting Wolfgang Weingart last year, I was amazed when he showed me examples of his most recent work. They were simple typographic designs bearing little resemblance to his earlier layered typographic experiments. Dan Friedman, one of the initiators of American New Wave, is currently entirely satisfied with creating what some might consider non-design. The book *Artificial Nature*, which he designed in 1990, consists primarily of full bleed photographs with short captions set in Futura bold, set in horizontal black rectangles which are each centered in the middle of the page. Even Jan Tschichold, after setting the design world on fire with his manifesto *Die Neue Typographie* (what is considered a safe refuge now was then the most radical approach to graphic design imaginable), would later return to an even safer refuge: classical, center-axis typography. There are numerous other graphic designers I can think of who have traveled this path.

Is this a natural course that designers who experiment inevitably take? Does all experimentation in graphic design lead to the simplification of graphic design? Are the graphic designers who concern themselves with complex solutions merely slow learners who try out the wildest schemes only to come to one conclusion, that less is more? Since we usually raise more questions with *Emigre* than we can answer, this seemed to be a topic right up our alley.

Rudy VanderLans

Starting From Zero

KEITH ROBERTSON
Zero

The will to eradicate the past with a new set of values and establish a new age is the Modernist mythology we inherit in the art books. The Modernists were political ideologues who rewrote history with a new brush. It was the Bauhaus groupies and Constructivists who designed a radical new workers' paradise and these movements helped create a new age; a future where the past would no longer be recycled because the new theory exposed the past as corrupt and outmoded. Theory was above all a belief that justified action. Theory WAS ideology. Starting from zero was not the obsession of the Dada anarchists nor the naive optimism of the Futurists. "Starting from zero" was the catch-phrase of one of the most influential, opinionated and ultimately conservative groups of architects and designers who were ideologically working out theories of functionalism in design. Here was design governed by an idea.

Much of the nineteenth century had to do with coming to terms with the Machine Age. John Ruskin and William Morris criticized nineteenth century British design and manufacture for their obsession with the materials of manufacture and utilitarianism. Reeling after the death and destruction of the First World War, it is not surprising that the next generation should take a harder line, apply the Modernist theory to their art, and be supermen creating a bold new future. They, after all, created the new Modernism and called it the "International Style" - it was international because it transcended the parochial national styles and traditions. It was the new art that expressed that which was universal in the world - the new technology of mass production

and standardization. In the past, it had been claimed that the machine was used to express the foibles of fashion victims who chose historical motif for ornament. A truly utilitarian art, they argued, would be based on an accurate appraisal of mechanical production in order to develop the truest, purest mechanical aesthetic. Standardization and streamlining were the key to this approach.

Towards a new order

Walter Gropius is the best known ideologue of the International Style, but he was only one of a phalanx of artists espousing the new art. He promoted a new unity where architecture became the center. Here, the fine arts served the crafts, which furnished the building with all its fittings and ornament. Theo van Doesburg was an important theorist. Neo-plasticism was concerned with the hard-line geometric truth behind all human production - both artistic and industrial. El Lissitzky and Laszlo Moholy-Nagy were two of the major practitioners of the new Neo-plasticism or Constructivism. What they shared was the desire to transcend national styles, a response to a new technology through their art. Early in the Modern movement, these artists were still developing what can be identified as parochial styles. But their theory was well ahead of their practice. They were working towards a new order even through the anarchy of Dada and the concrete poets.

In 1928, which was early in the development of Modernism, the first major manifesto on modern design was published by Jan Tschichold, called *Die Neue Typographie*. As with most radical movements, the more extreme ideas emerged first only to be watered down in practice. In Tschichold's case, he was to become one of the finest classical designers, overturning nearly all of his early theories. His propaganda for the International Style, however, was to remain influential in Europe and even the USA long after the war.

Die Neue Typographie advocated a new approach to typographic design, because modern designers were working in a new age. Tschichold rejected the printed tradition from the position of style, however, not of function, which was the flaw in his early argument that he was himself later to identify. So what was the new typography according to Tschichold?



Jan Tschichold: Prolegomena to the New Typography, 1928

1. It was essentially simple and pure design in harmony with the modern world.
2. Asymmetry replaced symmetry because it was more functional, reflecting the more complex rhythms of the modern age.
3. Only sans serif typefaces were efficient communicators of modern information. Serifs were relegated to the historians' scrap heap.
4. Where greater emphasis was needed, he insisted on using different weights of type (e.g. bold, demi-bold, light) rather than different faces and even point sizes.

There was also emerging a new emphasis on "objective" and "scientific" approaches to the page grid - one planned less by tradition (the golden section) and more by mathematics. The mathematical grid can be most clearly identified in the early designs of Theo Ballmer. The radical beginnings of the Modern movement started with the mad fruit salads of point sizes and faces of Dada and the bold asymmetry of Tschichold, Bayer and Moholy-Nagy. Slowly, however, there was a formalization and ossification of the Modern movement, culminating in Switzerland after the war.

Helvetica Hel-

vetica

Postwar Swiss design developed a new classicism, a new conservative benchmark to which most later designers seemed to retreat at times of crisis. Swiss movement artists based their designs on the Constructivist traditions of prewar Europe, but strove to perfect the theoretical position of Tschichold and others in their practice. They emphasized the bland, depersonalized, mechanical and objective principles of design that were close to being theoretically correct. It is interesting that the most successful examples of International Style design were posters for particular cultural events - art exhibitions, film festivals, industrial exhibitions and the like. It is rare for these recessive, stylized designs to be sufficiently engaging to serve a more commercial function.

Theo Ballmer was the first great International Stylist. In 1928, using strictly mathematical grids, he created posters with a hard-line purity unsurpassed stylistically until the fifties. He is distinguishable from his Constructivist contemporaries by his insistence on square grids and relatively small, single point sized, sans serif, asymmetrical type. Such discipline deserves a place in the pantheon.

Max Bill was a student at the Bauhaus in 1928, but had to wait until the war was over to sufficiently reduce his style to the barest of elements. He used strict mathematical proportions, asymmetry and generally small sizes of sans serif type, but always with a superb sense of balance between black and white space.

Armin Hoffmann was the classic fifties designer. He mastered the combination of disciplined asymmetric typography and often striking details from photographic sources. This element of his work was, however, eclipsed by the leading International Stylist Josef Müller-Brockmann, who established himself as its leading writer and propagandist.

It was Müller-Brockmann who spread the word that International Style was about to adopt the mannerisms of machine art. Here, pure spatial harmony would reign, governed by mathematical logic and a few self-imposed restrictions. These were designed to downplay individual talent and create an objective and reproducible style. In 1960 he produced his black, white, grey and red *der Film* poster. Surely this was the masterpiece of the fifties (for that is the decade to which it stylistically belongs). Designed with mathematical logic and using typographical elements alone to create a low-key but impressive poster, Müller-Brockmann sought to strip his work of all but the essential meanings. *der Film* was certainly close to zero.



Josef Müller-Brockmann, *der Film*, 1960.

Poor Zero

Since the fifties, zero seems to have slipped as a role model. Far from announcing the end of graphic design, because the Machine Age had at last found its true expression, International Style has simply become one of many design options. Each decade since the fifties seems to have spawned a range of graphic styles, but only aspects of psychedelic and Post-Modern design can be described as being primarily historical in orientation. POP and New Wave (or Post-Punk) do, at least, relate to their contemporary industrial cultures just as legitimately as International Style did to the consolidation of the postwar corporate giants.

There have, however, been some interesting reverberations of International Style through most of this period. More often than not, it is a safe haven to which many top designers can retreat after their innovations have been ripped off by the style vultures who make up the rest of the industry.

Milton Glaser, for instance, must rank as perhaps the greatest graphic innovator of the sixties. Glaser is best known for his eclectic themes, flat color and outlined illustration style; but each one of his designs is based on what was essentially a mathematical grid. Typographically, Glaser



Milton Glaser, *Poor Zero*.

would either use austere small and simple sans serif or he would invent some of the most vulgar decorative faces that even the drug obsessed sixties couldn't manage. Who could explain the lapse? Nevertheless, Glaser was a major inheritor of the International tradition. Instead of reaching back into history, POP simply reaches across to its contemporary commercial culture for inspiration and symbology. It is more imitative/appreciative simply of what exists - a value-free acceptance of the status quo, whether that status quo be commercial, capitalist or popular.

To understand Post-Modern sensibilities in design is to bring to contemporary design both the critical and uncritical aesthetics. Part of the appeal of Post-Punk design is the juxtaposition of the refined and vulgar, the classic and the gaudy, the kitsch and the technocratic.

Of the British Post-Punk designers, only Jamie Reid can be considered the consistent anarchist. Reid's designs are mostly concerned with making usually critical/outrageous sociopolitical statements that purposely reject the modern design aesthetic. Reid's aesthetic has more to do with graffiti and the randomness of found objects - the same anti-aesthetic used in the

handmade punk fanzines.

Starting with Barney Bubbles, there was an insistence on marrying Modern movement good taste with pop culture products, whether they be for mass production or the entertainment industry. Most interesting from this point of view is the work of Malcolm Garrett, Peter Saville and Neville Brody.

From the Modern movement has come the reawakening of the potential of typography

**NEVER MIND
THE BOLLOCKS**
HERE'S THE
SEX PISTOLS

NEW
ORDER
—
SUBSTANCE
1987

Journal Pre-proof

Page Size for C:\Program Files\MSN\MSN\MSN.exe: 30K

as the primary communicator in design. Typography is the hook on which Post-Modern design hangs. At first this "new" typography followed the same progression as the Modern movement had taken itself: first, the anarchist Dada fruit-salads of ransom note type, to classic, controlled, centered and serified elegance.

Along with a new type consciousness, there is also a new grid awareness that tends to wear its design process on its sleeve. The process of design, of preparing finished artwork, of being printed in the four color printing process, and laid out using mathematical precision and geometry is something often exposed through the artwork. Post-Punk design, when it is plundering the rules of the Modern movement for ideas, tends to use Modernism simply as the formal layer of its artwork. Most likely, the contemporary layer, be it an illustration, a photograph or even a digitally distorted device, will be there by nature of its juxtaposition and incongruity.

Poor Neville Brody! What a dilemma, to be the world's most ripped-off designer. Brody was not exceptional in the British context, but out of context (a position he was projected into with the international distribution of *The Face* magazine) he is seen as a lone innovator. He is fast becoming yet another of those art geniuses London and New York are so keen to generate. For most of his time at *The Face*, Brody was reworking Modern movement design history. His most original contribution, however (and he claims only to have resorted to this out of sheer ripped-off desperation), was to design his own typefaces. These give an element of Post-Modernity to an

North South Korean Trade: 1990-1995

give an element of Post-Modernity to an otherwise shared art school awareness of recent design history. It seems that the role of taste trendsetter is one that *The Face* sets for itself, but it is not apparently the role Brody wishes to contribute to. So where do you go to as a Post-Modern designer when you are ripped-off by the system? Where else but to the safe refuge of International Style? At least the bland and mechanical is a safe harbor where the logic of construction belongs to history rather than a new boy genius.

[illegible]

at least with

amanda donohoe

Asian jack-o'-lanterns, seafood and champagne
with life-sized castaways. Vampires, seductress
and schroom stress

2000-2001



After arriving at Cranbrook Academy of Art for my very first visit to these hallowed grounds, my initial reaction was not much different from anybody else's. The Cranbrook campus is inspiring, set in the glacial wooded surroundings of Bloomfield Hills, a suburb just outside of Detroit (and only blacked away from Louis Thomas' mansion), the campus easily lives up to its idyllic image.

On the inside, however, the design studios, are a different story altogether. After having read the book *Cranbrook Design: The New Discourse*, and seeing the ultra slick, beautifully detailed, perfectly executed two and three-dimensional designs, I was stunned to see the environment in which these were created. I can't explain exactly what I had expected, but the last thing I had in mind was the image of a hazy canteen in northern Oregon during the early 1970's. But that's about as well as I can describe it. There were dogs running around, babies crying and not a square inch of saved table space. The place was packed with couches, microwaves, chairs, books, pots and pans, dog bowls, computers, all haphazardly partitioned with makeshift panels and drapeth curtains. I was impressed.

However, during my stay at Cranbrook, I was informed that it hadn't always been like this. Most students I met at Cranbrook consider the book *Cranbrook Design: The New Discourse* a testament of times past and the book itself had given rise to a need to move on. As one student explained, the change in environment was somewhat reflective of a different attitude towards design and life in general.

Following is an interview with Katherine McCoy, head of the Graphic Design Department at Cranbrook. The interview was initially meant as a series of questions about the book. Later on, however, some of the students, as well as Cranbrook alumnus Edward Fella, became involved and the interview turned into a discussion about the new direction in which they felt graphic design was headed and other related topics.

3...days at Cran- Brook

Emigre: The Modernist standpoint as expressed by Emil Ruder was very much against the use of idiosyncrasies in design, particularly regarding the use of typefaces. He envisioned the use of a neutral typeface (Univers), aloof from all national considerations. Cranbrook's work is exactly the opposite. It is instilled with American cultural and vernacular references and relies heavily on the English language with wordplay and verbal aerobics. Are you consciously trying to create a more "local" non-universal visual language?

Kathy McCoy: Mike (McCoy) and I have been very concerned, since the early seventies, since reading Robert Venturi's *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture and Learning from Las Vegas*, with the need to learn how to be one of a kind, while at the same time speak to the values of our audiences. Whereas with Modernism, it was the opposite. And I know this personally from having merged into graphic design as a Swiss School designer. We were trying to impose a universal language on every client because it was the right thing to do. We had a meta system. We knew better than our clients did, we knew better than our audiences did, and we were going to impose a universal visual language. And then there developed a growing awareness that it just wasn't really reaching people. Although, in fact, it turned out to reach corporate people pretty well. The reason why it wasn't reaching people reflects the growing ethnic awareness in the United States in the late sixties and seventies, when ethnic groups became aware

of and took pride in their heritage and their uniqueness. The emphasis up to then had been to more or less become as American as possible and to be part of the mass society. Lately we've moved into an era of more cultural fragmentation and ethnic celebration. Marketing has changed from mass marketing to targeted marketing, and design should also be tied more to people's specific values.

Emigre: When your work becomes this personal and when it celebrates local culture and includes its vernacular, how do your students deal with that when, for instance, they go and work in Holland, which they do a lot? How do they deal with these ideas of the vernacular and the intricacies of wordplay in the Dutch language? Does that not present a problem?

Kathy: That should really be answered by someone who has worked abroad but unfortunately no one here has. Isn't it a little strange to see Robert Nakata's postage stamp for the Dutch Railroad? It's in Dutch. So is he a cultural chameleon? In a way, isn't that an aspect of what a designer should be? You have to be a chameleon to shape your message to the audience so that you can resonate with that audience.

Emigre: Where does Cranbrook's interest in Dutch design stem from?

Kathy: I discovered Dutch design for myself around 1982. We went to Holland and saw some of the work and we recognized there were concerns and enthusiasms similar to ours. Even if you can't read the words, there is a very visual character in their work that is uniquely Dutch. There's a lot of humor and irreverence, and poking holes in pretension. What I really admired about Dutch design and why I brought some back to show the students that first trip (and then I brought a whole bunch back after my sabbatical and it turned into an exhibition), was how Dutch it was. It was authentic. There was a straight line progression between early Modernism, De Stijl and Piet Zwart. You can trace the lineage all the way through the decades, and Piet Zwart was still lecturing at GVN (Dutch Graphic Designers Association) meetings in the middle seventies, telling them about what they were doing wrong, and what design should be. The designers we met, we noticed, were looking to their history and were including early modern forms and references out of a direct cultural memory. And I felt that a lot of this late Modern or Post-Modern work was somewhat analogous to what was happening in the US with New Wave. But the Dutch were doing it for authentic cultural reasons, whereas we were doing it as if we were mining history. We'd say "Isn't that vernacular nifty," a banquet of stuff ready to be appropriated. That's why I was interested in Dutch design. Maybe we could look at it as a role model. Maybe we could see what operations they were carrying on, and we could find what might be the equivalent for us that would achieve the same authenticity. I could ask myself, I'm from Detroit, now how do I reflect my culture here in Detroit? How do I reflect my history? What is my history? Not to imitate Dutch design, but to find a parallel.

"There are social as well as political questions inherent in the new Cranbrook projects. In the supposedly classless United States, what are these designers doing raiding the manual worker's vernacular? When Paul Montgomery designs a portable microwave oven that resembles and even serves as an analogue to the workman's lunchbox, or when Lisa Krohn designs a personal computer that looks and operates like a tool bit, they are trying to link the labor culture of the manual era to that of the electronic. There is social awareness, a certain wit, and utility here, but there are also risks in adopting vernacular motifs. It runs the risk of patronizing workers in old patterns of labor; and it might also patronize the more sensitive users of the new equipment, plucking at the righty consciences. After all, theirs, in a roundabout way, are the jobs that have supplanted the old manual ones."

Hugh Aldersey-Williams, *Cranbrook Design: The New Discourse*.

Emigre:

What do you think about Hugh Aldersey's concerns regarding the use of vernacular elements when he raises the question "what are these designers doing raiding the manual worker's vernacular?" He

mentions that there is a social and political risk involved, that it might patronize the manual laborer.

Kathy: The piece that Hugh was referring to specifically was Paul Montgomery's portable microwave oven. The design makes a reference to a working man's lunch box. I don't agree with Hugh's point. Many of us had lunchboxes like these. I don't really see that it's not part of our culture. Hugh is from a more class-conscious society, and may not realize that America is much more a mass society where all of us share the working man tradition. Although Hugh wasn't really talking about graphic design, he could have very well been talking about Scott Zukowski's "Loaf" poster too, because he used similar working man's images. Scott's poster is about breadwinning and the working man. It is a theme that runs through his work a lot. That's his family background, so he wasn't superimposing an ethic; it's his ethic.

Emigre: But the audience doesn't know that about Scott Zukowski...

Scott Makela: Well, then you should ask yourself, who is more important, the designer or the audience? Sometimes it is fun to give yourself more pleasure and let the audience take what it can. Why should they crowd me in my experience?

Kathy: Also, a lot of the appropriated images that are used are



Scott Zukowski, Poster, 1984

clichés, and are almost authorless. By repeatedly appropriating things that are out in the environment, without any identifiable source, they become part of a universal popular culture. They speak very clearly to the audience. Everybody knows what they mean, and the context that the designer puts them in will give them a certain slant. The "Loaf" poster is a good example. It says: "He is an idle man," and you have to decide whether you agree with that or not. When is he idle? Sitting in his lounge? Or is he an idle man who is working very hard physically, but not mentally? What does that mean? What do you think? What's your bias? ...

Edward Fella: Or is he out of work? That was part of the discussion. The word "Loaf" has a double meaning. It is also a verb as in "Gee, all these people are loafing," when the truth might be that they're unemployed because there is no work, that masses of people are idle for other reasons than the fact that they themselves are somehow responsible. There might be no demand for their physical labor. Those were the questions that Scott Zukowski was raising with that particular poster. Also, it is important to know that that poster was a critical exercise. It was not meant to convey a particular message, the way Paul Montgomery's lunchbox was meant as a product. So the two, even though they use the same imagery, were done in a totally different context. However, in Montgomery's case too, it was hardly condescending. It was the idea of celebrating the working man or the idea of work, that this was not something that should be ignored or marginalized or somehow made invisible.

Kathy: Hugh also touched on a related discussion about the use of French Post-Structuralism and literary theory. He assumes that because there is a Marxist element in the literary theory, it is strange for largely upper middle-class graduate students in the Midwest to be applying these ideas. He was questioning the appropriateness. I think probably a lot of those ideas are fairly workable without that particular brand of late 20th century European intellectuals' Marxism. I think these ideas bend fairly well to an American social democratic populace. It can be anti-authoritarian, but in an American popular ethic, or better yet, a frontier individualist ethic, as opposed to the European late Marxist ethic. Hugh might contend that you can't separate it from the Marxism, but we feel you can.

Emigre: When I was in Switzerland, I met with many young Swiss designers who, each in their own way, were revolting against the legacy of designers such as Emil Ruder and Armin Hoffmann. They kept mentioning that Swiss Design "oversimplified" things, they mentioned that it "reduced the truth." My comments on some of the Cranbrook work would be that it often overstates the contents. Sometimes you can't see the trees for the forest. Is it possible to overstate the designs by using too much personal or cryptic or ambiguous meaning?

Scott: Of course you can overstate messages. You try to draw a line, but there is a lot of work produced at Cranbrook that goes way over that line. But those are the things that shape you, and you can always pull back. If you don't go out far enough, you will never know what's possible. **Ed:** You know that adage about science taking very complex ideas and trying to simplify them, whereas philosophy takes fairly simple ideas and complicates them? Those are attitudes that exist within design, too. Sometimes, when there are



Book Format Design Concept.

The intention of this book format is to raise some questions about normal syntactic expectations in our readers. These ideas began in the essay "The New Discourse," published in *ID* (March/April 1988). The basic page experiment is based on a classical or traditional text block centered horizontally with generous margins on all sides. The *Badon Book* (by Beitsvram) body copy face is generously loaded and justified, both also traditional book approaches. A centered axis runs through the copy block like a "faux line" that affects the right half of the text from the left a fraction of a horizontal line space. In the essay, word pairs are interwoven through the copy block organized on the centered axis. (This idea comes from the 1959 *Design Department Poster*.) The word pairs are dualities that describe to the range of possibilities in design: material/immateral, grammar/parts, critical/lyrical, etc. The tension point created by this central faux line refers to the creative tension found in design in the resolution of seemingly oppositional values, phonological and formal such as art and science or the visual and verbal. This visual theme suggests the multivalent, ambiguous and continuously changing nature of design. This centered axis is referenced in the other essays as a vertical space line a "lazy line" on a *Nashua* blanker that runs vertically through each centered copy block. The line should be almost subliminal, almost not noticed. On the other hand, it almost seems to indicate that the page's text is divided into two columns, so the reader must see if reading sense comes from reading the full line across the lazy line. The page numbers are reversed out of a small black that has also been fractured on the faux line of each page. Since the essays are all together at the beginning of the book, the centered text block of *Badon* is a constant in all the essays to unify the section.

The book's title logotype continues the idea of the faux line. Although each word itself remains in horizontal alignment, the frames that carry the words are fractured slightly as they cross the central axis of the type unit. The head and subhead are deliberately interwoven to encourage alternate readings, including "The New Cranbrook Design" and "The Cranbrook Design Discourse."

A Victorian-era face called *Emigre* (by Beitsvram) is used in some of the heads, subheads and as part of the caption text. It has a 19th century book text look to it. It is frequently mixed with an early Modern face called *Geometric* by Beitsvram, a true relative of *Futura*.

The text, quotes, captions and photos are positioned to just meet at their left or right edges, suggesting patches of type or photos "pasted" onto the page. This sort of magnetic attraction between elements is also a departure from layout "norms." The images are generally centered in white space with generous margins, a traditional convention. The caption text faces are geometric *Bold*, *Badon Book* and *Emigre*; the various faces differentiate the various elements of the captions.

The intention is a conservative format rooted in classical book design, but with subtle interventions to break the rules of normalcy. Hopefully, on a quick scan, the pages appear traditional, but when read will reveal subtle aberrations that make the reader conscious of the syntax or grammar of book text.

fairly simple messages to convey, the philosophical approach, complicating them, makes them more interesting. Another approach to design when you have very complex messages to convey is to synthesize and simplify them.

Kathy: Every project is different and requires a different kind of treatment. Once you leave Cranbrook, you have to be capable of doing the range of design approaches... **Ed:** Right! And nobody is advocating this "overstating" approach for a manual for, let's say, brain surgery. This "overstated" approach frequently is done for things that are cultural messages that would include a time, place, date and name, and where there isn't really anything in the information that's very complicated. But the culture that surrounds it, the context, is very complex, and that is what's put into these pieces.

! Baby cries !

Emigre: Part of the work produced at Cranbrook is explained as a reaction against Modernist ideas. In the book *Cranbrook Design: The New Discourse*, it is stated that there are "serious doubts about the function of the International Style as a means of visual communication," and that students have "challenged the sterility of this 'universal design'." But most of the work that you do here, in a reaction to Modernist ideas, is work that is played out in very ideological projects. It is not played out, for instance, in corporate identities, which is really where, in your eyes, Modernism has failed. The Cranbrook book shows posters for the most part; there is not one corporate identity shown.

Kathy: In the alumni part of the book there are several logotypes. But yes, we really chose to publish the more polemical work. People come to Cranbrook after doing very systematic, program-driven work as professional designers. The idea is that during the two years at Cranbrook, you can involve yourself in more personal, more culturally oriented work. One thing that might not show up, but is certainly embedded in my own personal process, and I think it probably comes out in a lot of the critiques I give of work, was in an ongoing project called the "Vernacular Message Sequence." This project was more or less the foundation of our approach to graphic design, although we didn't show too many examples of this in the book. This project's sequence goes from the extremely analytical, reductionist approach, where you are working on a message analysis and coming up with hierarchies and structure as the entry point, before proceeding to the more creative expressive personal phases of the project. The project covers the full range, from the highly objective to the highly subjective. I believe that today, everybody learns this in undergraduate school, or has learned it on the job, before they come to Cranbrook, so we don't spend too much time doing that anymore. It's embedded in their thinking. It might not be visible in the final manifestation, but hopefully, as you approach the content, as you are reading it, you will get an intuitive sense of that structure. Nobody is following grids much, currently, but that thinking is embedded in our students' methodologies.

! Baby cries !

Scott: Are you saying that it might be interesting to see some work produced here that would challenge a more systematic approach?

Emigre: Yes, I would find it interesting to see the experimental work that is done here be applied to, let's say, a huge corporate identity, instead of posters only.

Scott: I think it is possible. It's one of many things possible, but it doesn't necessarily have to be studied here. Many of us have come to Cranbrook to more or less de-professionalize, and that means also ceasing to work on systematic projects for a while, to give our brain cells a little bit of a break and to look into other directions.

Kathy: Scott Santoro has taken the experiments of his student work and is beginning to apply them to his professional work. Of course it is not quite as radical, but that is because he is working with different parameters, with strict program criteria.

Emigre: But most of the work done by Cranbrook graduates is still for art institutions or culturally oriented projects.

Kathy: Not all of it is, but yes, you will see that an awful lot of the work in the book is for somewhat culturally connected clients. One thing we talk about a lot here is the message, and how it is the designer's duty to take somebody else's message and give form to it, and how your design is only as interesting as the message. So one thing that people do when they leave here is look for the interesting clients who have something worth saying, as opposed to, for instance, discount shoe stores. If it's banal going in, it's going to be banal coming out, no matter how fine a designer you are. So on the one hand it's a process of natural selection. The work of the people that leave here is more appropriate for culturally connected things, but they're also very consciously seeking out interesting, worthy clients.

Emigre: To me, what seems to be the most ambitious idea behind Cranbrook is your wish to provide a place for individuals to develop a personal and individual approach to design. Is it not inevitable that a sameness will surface as a direct result from working so closely together? Doesn't it make sense to think that the only way to develop an individual approach is by working by yourself, maybe even somewhat secluded from outside influences?

Scott: Something we all try not to do is work like each other, although we don't work that way very consciously. I believe that in some ways, the more interchange there is, the more our work tends to change in a direction opposite from our classmates.

Emigre: But I do see a certain sameness in the work coming out of Cranbrook. There are characteristics in a lot of Cranbrook work that I can recognize as being Cranbrook work; for instance, Mark's poster for the Pet Lamp. I think this is a beautiful poster, but to me it is a particularly Cranbrook poster. The obscure photograph, the highly personal, abstract graphic elements, the typographic treatments, the various layers of messages both informative and more personal or ambiguous, the absence of a traditional typographic hierarchy. It is very reminiscent of Allen Hori's work, who I feel pushed that particular approach to its limits. And people have used this approach in a variety of ways. I also don't think this is bad, but I do see it as a recurring visual approach. Often people refer to it as a style, which you dislike, but still I see it being created. And to me it seems inevitable that this would happen, because you work so closely together.

Kathy: First of all, style, as an art historian understands style, is the visible manifestation of shared values, cultural values, sociological values. We're really not aware of it as a style so much as a shared set of concerns that we all talk about. So yes, I guess there's going to be some continuity because there is this conversation going on at any given time. Gordon Salchow from the University of Cincinnati wrote a piece for *Print* magazine a few years ago about that. The article was in response to an accusation that his school has a school style, and Philadelphia College of Art has a school style, etc. He wrote that it's quite natural to have a style, and that if a school does not have a school style it doesn't have a developed philosophy or value system. So you should have some continuity or it means there is no structure. The question then is how do you balance individuality with shared influence? You can't help but influence each other.

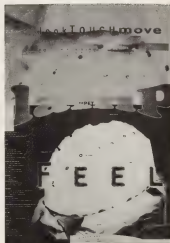
Scott: The first thing that happens when you come to Cranbrook is that you find yourself in a vacuum. You're in the middle of Bloomfield Hills, you can't find any places to eat, or any of the other distractions that you used to have that would offer some "air." There is a kind of fasting period that you go through when you first come to Cranbrook. And then also, at least for me, I found myself surrounded by this Midwestern "normalness." Michigan is "hyper" normal in a way. It has really affected my work a lot. And everyone is affected differently. Everyone is in shock the first couple of semesters.

Kathy: But when you get here, don't you immediately set about to make your own rules and statements? When we looked at the show ("Cranbrook Design: The New Discourse") in the museum right after it opened, there was a strong sense that everybody was looking at it as history, not as something connected with what the current students were doing.

Ed: People have asked me what will happen at Cranbrook because of this book, whether it is going to solidify Cranbrook. Even though Cranbrook always had a reputation, the current students are the first generation that has to deal with the effect that a book like this will have. Let's face it, this book now gives it a kind of certification or legitimacy. Will people be intimidated by that, or will they feel that they have to work this way, or what?

Kathy: I am surprised that people look at the book as if it were some sort of monolithic body of work, while in fact it represents the work of many different groups, little clusters of people, who each were adamantly different from the people preceding them, who are also in this book.

Ed: Yes, that was precisely my personal experience at Cranbrook. The group that I was with felt very strongly about not being a continuation of what went before, and the group after me felt just as strongly about us. And I don't foresee this changing because of the



Mark Salchow Poster for the Pet Lamp, Cranbrook Design: The New Discourse



"When I was at Cranbrook
there never were any dogs or
food. We only had Martinis.
No food, no animals at all, no
babies...not even a fax!" —Edward Fella



book. And as a reaction to Emigre's comment that there is a sameness in the Cranbrook work, I have to say that there is a sameness when everything is individual. That in itself is a particular style. Just like order and chaos. All chaos looks like chaos, but all the individual elements of chaos might be very different, just as the individual elements of order are sometimes very different. And we are just as guilty of looking at the kind of glossy professional work that you see all around you and just writing it off as all being the same. We say it's all slick, it's all sterile, whereas if you really look at it closely, it has a lot of differences. So it happens on both ends.

Emigre: I think you are exaggerating about the differences that exist in Cranbrook work ... **Ed:** But there are differences. The students themselves are very different from each other, different backgrounds, interests, different types ... **Laurie Haycock:** *Except they are all still the type that would go to Cranbrook. And that's a very particular type. Among all the kinds of graphic designers in the country, there's a particular type that are somehow disappointed with the profession and want time out to start over. Many of us came to Cranbrook because we saw what was going on here and we admired those who were doing it, but we also feel a need to react against that. I don't know anyone who comes to Cranbrook saying I want to be like this or that. They'd be stupid to say that. A lot of us have reacted very strongly against the making of these very complex messages. I think what we may be seeing in the next wave is this really flat-footed, very direct, really empty space, almost back to Modernism type of work, only more quirky. There is definitely something going on that is a direct reaction against what this book (Cranbrook Design: The New Discourse) contains. And in my mind this book coincides perfectly with graphic design reaching the limit of complexity. This approach was taken to the most gorgeous extent, the most hyper, decadent, baroque means of expression. And many of us have said yes, it's beautiful, but it's enough, let's move on.*

Emigre: Isn't that the history of design in a nutshell? This going back and forward between objective and subjective, from rational to emotional, from simple to complex? Are we ever going to head into an entirely different direction? Or is that possible at all?

Laurie: *I think what will be different is two things: the kinds of subjects that you start seeing design bring wrapped around and also the technology that is now involved which allows anyone to do it.*

Kathy: I don't think it can possibly return to late sixties minimalism. We know too much, there is too much pluralism.

Scott: But what is your impression of Cranbrook? You mentioned that you were somewhat intimidated, especially after reading the book.

Emigre: Yes, I was intimidated. After reading the book, I was expecting to meet a group of intellectuals who would have lengthy discussions about design theory and quote from Derrida and Foucault. I seriously considered reading up on my French Philosophy before flying down. But most of the discussions I've had here weren't much different from the ones I have with most designers. What has happened with all the reading in Post-Structuralist French literary theory and Post-Modern art criticism?

Kathy: It's been more or less digested and internalized.

Scott: I don't think it is arguable anymore. **Kathy:** It is still there. Scott and Laurie's *Sex Goddess* poster demonstrated a continued interest in multiple readings. But we don't spend a lot of time arguing theory because everybody already knows it.

Emigre: But I was so disappointed to find out that, for instance, Allen Hori never talked about his work. And here's a designer that you would really like to hear talk about his work because maybe there will be new levels of meaning surfacing that will allow you to enjoy his work even more.

Kathy: In crits, after a lengthy discussion, we would get to a point where you just felt like asking him, "But Allen what does that mean?" It all means something to him, but it couldn't be put into words.

Ed: He just couldn't express it.

Kathy: Some of the meaning was subverbal. But much of his content was about verbal communications theories - for instance the text in his *Too Lips* or *Sutra* posters. Although Allen read and drew on these ideas, they did not come up in his discussions much. Perhaps that is because there is a lot of the intuitive artist in his working method.

Laurie: *With all these dogs running around and babies crying, visitors to Cranbrook*

will go home thinking *hmmm, ... not much theory going on there at Cranbrook, but a very interesting family life. And we laugh about it, but I think that it's not just a comical coincidence. There is a kind of shift taking place from the heavily theoretical in life, to an interest in more ordinary values. We're looking at phenomenology again, and talking about "real" experience. There will always be a theoretical thread going through all our work. But what has happened is that a lot of people felt exhausted by what theory got them or didn't get them. And in fact, ordinary experiences, things like having a baby or keeping dogs, in a way, are part of the theory continuum, because they are very distinct reactions against theory or a reaction after theory.*

Scott: Last year, people started reading Kerouac and Bukowski again. It's interesting to see how someone else lives. We almost forgot how rich those "real" experiences are. Sometimes work that is formed from theory can be very ... **Kathy:** One thing about Post-Structural theory was that it was all about words. It was about verbal language, and it was about seeing visual language as an analogy to the verbal process. Brad Collins used to go around the studios saying that language precedes thought. As if you can't think until you know language, as opposed to thought preceding language. I think people got an overdose of verbal theory. Also, in hindsight, it strikes me that the highly cerebral verbal character of Post-Structural ideas is particularly male in its concerns. I think we are now balancing that discourse with a more subjective, less verbal, experiential inquiry that could be considered a more female sensibility. Both seem very valuable to design.

Ed: Yes, and theories such as Post-Structuralism, for instance, lead to a narrow kind of endpoint that finally say that everything is interpreted and nothing really exists, which becomes laughable after a while. Post-Modernism was also about the notion that there was no more real experience, everything was jaded, and a lot of people ended up saying that this is a lot of crackpot stuff.

Emigre: So did this particular approach fail just as Modernism did?

Ed: I don't think that Modernism failed. In design, when people refer to Modernism, and particularly when they refer to its failures, they usually are referring only to so-called Swiss design, which is only one segment of Modernism. Modernism includes a lot more than this kind of narrow thing that is usually looked at, and particularly when it comes to the failures, if they even were. The biggest problem with Modernism was that it was somehow timeless, that it was somehow outside of and beyond everything. Modernism was the truth and there was nothing else and it would hold for the next two thousand years.

Emigre: People still think like that. Look at Massimo Vignelli's poster. He makes it sound as if anybody would have a hold or grip on how culture develops or should develop. On the other hand, his signage for the NY subway system for instance, or Jan Tschichold's redesign of the Penguin books, were projects where Modernist ideas worked perfectly.

Kathy: Yes, some of these Modernist solutions were the right solutions. But to me you can separate the visual language of Modernism from the conceptual process of Modernism. It is quite an exceptional process. To first analyze and conceptualize a design problem is very useful. And then to move on to the design phases, to the form-giving process. However, the form doesn't always have to be minimal, geometricized, reductionist, abstracted, self-referential form. It can be all kinds of things. I think that is something that people misunderstand sometimes. They look at something that has a different formal vocabulary and assume it doesn't have anything to do with Modernism. I don't think that Modernism failed and was rejected. I think it got internalized into the mix of pluralisms. And now there is an interest in preverbal or subverbal experience. Last year we had a very intense seminar in phenomenology. We had had it up to here with verbalizing, and said now let's see what some of the other dynamics are, and add on to it, not necessarily to reject what came before. There is now an understanding that you don't have to reject history in order to move forward. It's a progression of ideas. And we're not really inventing it at Cranbrook. We seem to be proceeding pretty much parallel to developments in fine art, Post-Modern theory and architecture, both nationally and internationally.

**NO
SIGN
NO
FORM
NO
WORD
NO
GOD**

I was cranky and dehydrated. It was the morning after the party--the party of a thousand meaningless typefaces and dead-end discourses--I just didn't feel like getting up and making anything.

Can't make anything out of aesthetic and philosophical fallout. Can't find anything new in the black hole of Post-Modernism. The chattering, so-called "layering" of vacant meanings and the little type-tick fetishes that make graphic designers speak non-sense to each other just made me want to leave the party.

After prolonged theoretical dry-heaving, I made this piece within a month of arriving at Cranbrook: No form begins with an academic rejection of Modernism. No word is what I get if I call on literary theory to tell the story. No sign is what I'm left with as Deconstructivism steals the meaning from my experience and cuts it into little pieces. No god is the endpoint of confusion and doubt in the Post-Modern world.

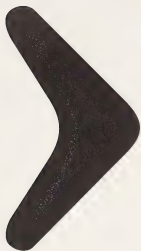
This philosophical/emotional polemic poured lava-like over the studio discourse. My colleagues responded with equally direct language: from Kathleen Palmer's "Comprehend the Divine," a huge piece soaked in Christian ideology, to Scott Makela's muscular command to "Select Your Network" with the word "Your" digitally sifted into the back of a black man's neck. My own piece was a photograph of an excited, engorged clitoris called "Response of the Vulva."

The point is: consider an image of the smallest thing, the central thing, the only thing you know as authentic experience. Start there and be direct. Perfection doesn't count.

For your orientation, you are at

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(please continue)



Henk Elenga is one of the founding members of the Dutch design group Hard Werken. He moved to California in 1981 to open the "L. A. Desk" of Hard Werken in Hollywood. Although his business card states that he specializes in graphic and furniture design, Elenga has been involved in music, video, performance art and photography. His furniture designs and photographs have been exhibited around the world. Among the many clients that he works for are Epcot and Warner Brothers Records, for whom he has designed numerous album covers. Currently he is working on the design of the new manuscripts for Epcot. He remains one of the most inspirational influences to this magazine's designers.

"Creativity at its deepest, is a return to a primary process rather than a response to external stimuli. My choice of using photography, in the artistic process, is only for formalization and stylization."

Henk Elenga



Henk Elenga: Two Balls, 1981. Jet 21 x 24, 27" x 22"





Headlong, The space sculpture, 1988



Blackout, sculpture, 1988



"My Father's remains are
the false form of existence, it
is existence as absence."

Emigre: Are you comfortable?

Henk: Yes, I just freshened myself up a bit. I just did some physical labor.

Emigre: Physical labor? Are you welding furniture again?

Henk: No, I was repairing my seventeen year old espresso machine. And I'll tell you, this is a completely uneconomical hobby. It's already taken up two full days. And I don't want to buy a new one, because a new one is six hundred bucks and I enjoy fixing things. It's like working on a car, you get to use different skills. It's sort of mindless and eh... the espresso machine, it's Italian. I bought it in Italy and carried it all the way with me to the States, so it also has sentimental value. I had to actually drive out to the Valley this morning to the dealer that sells spare parts for it, which took me a full hour.

Emigre: I remember planning to visit you in Los Angeles a while back, and I could never get a hold of you because you were always fixing your motorbike.

Henk: Yes, and I'm still fixing it. Old motorbikes, sewing machines, they're the last machines you can still fix yourself. Computers you can't fix yourself, you have to throw them away. And it's so easy to throw this espresso machine away and buy a new one, but I won't do it. Although this stuff is always interfering with my work. It's real busy at the moment.

Emigre: What are all these jobs that you are working on lately? I remember, about a year ago, you were getting pretty depressed about doing any graphic design.

Henk: It's just that everybody is a graphic designer these days and I started to feel obsolete. So I lost interest to a certain degree. I would show my work and everybody would love it, or hate it, but regardless, the next thing I knew they were imitating it. That's supposed to be a qualification of your skills nowadays. And often they end up doing it better than me.

Emigre: How is that possible?

Henk: They take it further. I stopped developing it, so they have better tools to do what I was doing. They can make it look good, but there's no substance. Where does it come from, you wonder? Or does it really matter where it comes from? Because all of a sudden their imitations do get a life of their own. It's like with a typeface...

Emigre: You always talk about your work as being very intuitive, and say that your immediate surroundings are a very important inspiration. You have also taught at Cal Arts and still do quite a few workshops. How do you teach this type of approach to graphic design? Do you simply say "use your intuition and look around you"?

Henk: Yes, that's basically it. People don't look around them, they just don't. L O O K. I make sure my students don't fall asleep. I punch them and I kick them if I have to, and I really stir up things. It's so easy to fall asleep. And I don't teach them anything specific. All I want to do is help them open up. We were all put onto this planet with the same skills, but in different environments and social circumstances. The world is not fair in that respect. This morning, on the radio, there was a lady who had just returned from a Third World country and she talked about how it had really opened up her eyes. It had made her appreciate her own country so much more. If you have never been out of your backyard, you are easily shocked. Experience, knowledge, education, they are all very important. They enrich your life.

Emigre: But most people live ordinary lives and most people never get a chance to travel extensively and live life to the fullest. This is your audience. You are never going to please them.

Henk: Oh, but I will. They are extremely impressed with what I can do. And I don't think I am a genius. The things I create are just things that I like to do. But people are always amazed by what I do. They ask me how do you make furniture? How did you start making furniture? But I just do it. I always say, if you can't buy it, make your own furniture. In the process you will discover that you need quite a few skills, but most you can learn simply by doing it.

Emigre: You're a very practical, hands on, straight-through-the-middle kind of a guy.

Henk: Well, I am from Holland.

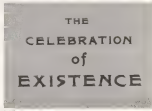
Emigre: And what does that mean?

Henk: Well, I was educated there. What I am is very much determined by my cultural heritage. The Dutch are very practical people. They are also very stubborn and they think they know everything, yet they are also very innocent. The state provides the Dutch people with a very protective environment. There are a lot of things you don't have to worry about in Holland. The state takes very good care of you. For Americans, these are unrealistic notions.

Emigre: Since you are such a practical, down to earth, intuitive designer, what do you think of the type of design that



Neil Denzler, Ceding, 1990



Neil Denzler, Ceding, 1990



Photo: David Laundy for The New York Times

"The last Taboo, the awareness of existence I experienced by staging my own death. Dying became living."

people at, for instance, Cranbrook have been involved in, and their efforts to use French Post-Structuralist theory as a starting point?

Henk: Well, it gives them a reference. They are exploring. They are in search of new ways to approach graphic design. I saw Kathy McCoy speak about this in Texas. And when you invent something you try to sell it. Or if you don't have a need to sell it, you try to convince other people of your theory. But when you start intellectualizing such things as the design process, the words easily become more than what is actually accomplished. Piet Schreuders talked about this in the interview in *Emigre* #17. He expressed his disappointment with designers who are very articulate but whose work never quite measures up. It's all words, it's all about language. They get lost intellectualizing all these forms when they try to tie their work in with the entire world. They explain their work by saying, "Well Plato's interpretation is this or that and therefore blah, blah blah..." In order for the audience to understand it, you have to first explain the classics to them. You run the risk of being understood only by a very small audience. But I am not saying that it is wrong for American students to use French philosophy as a starting point. It doesn't matter where you find your starting point. Everything ties together on hindsight anyway, because we are all human beings, right?

In her lecture, Kathy McCoy also showed a beautiful poster. On it was an image, which turned into a big spiral towards the bottom. It looked like everything - type, colors, image - were being sucked into a big black hole. I think this is a perfect time for Kathy to stop working. That particular poster seems to symbolize an endpoint. And being a graphic designer is like being a top athlete. Everybody gets to his or her peak. The same is true for Neville Brody. He should have stopped when he was still ahead.

Emigre: You think everybody eventually falls into that trap?

Henk: I don't think it is a trap. I think it is a natural course.

Emigre: Have you gone through that?

Henk: I ask myself that everyday. I certainly don't want to repeat myself over and over again, because it gets really boring. If I don't have anything to say anymore I will just shut up. There are very few people that can continue to develop. Ed Fella is probably one of the few people I know who has. The guy did well within the commercial world but then he kept playing and experimenting and evolving.

Emigre: I have noticed that in contrast with the work that your Hard Werken partners in Holland are creating currently, your work has remained fairly simple and intuitive. Your "Literary" poster seems very impulsive, almost like the work you did in the early eighties when Hard Werken just started.

Henk: Sometimes I rediscover things I did years ago and realize that they weren't that bad, that they were actually quite good, and it often inspires me to continue working in that way. And I don't intellectualize my work too much. If I do, it becomes dead, it loses its soul or spirit. A lot of things I do are simply very intuitive.

Emigre: Was earlier Hard Werken work the result of a particular time, and do you think you can repeat that again?

Henk: I am still doing it. I never tried to capture the time on purpose. The designers at Hard Werken in Holland, they say that I still design in the spirit of Hard Werken of 10 years ago.

Emigre: Is that meant as a compliment?

Henk: For me it's a compliment. Of course the Hard Werken company in Holland is much bigger than the branch here. At Hard Werken in Holland there's more pressure. It is all glossy and paintbox and superimposed and steel cutouts. The sky is the limit. But there is a different demand too, I guess. Although I think now, in Holland, things are changing, too.

Emigre: How are they changing?

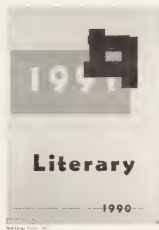
Henk: People are simplifying their design again and are going back to using only one or two typefaces.

Emigre: A reaction against Gert Dumbar?

Henk: Oh yes. People are totally sick of all that staged photography and layers and layers of layers. Too many layers and you can't read a thing anymore. It's the same with Cranbrook design. It's like they've been building this house of playing cards. You build it up but at a certain point it will all collapse.

Emigre: So are we now going back again to flush left, ragged right sans serif typography? Are we starting from scratch again? And are we going to build another house of playing cards, which will collapse again? And will this repeat endlessly?

Henk: I think so, because people never learn. Well, they learn but then they forget. People are still killing each other. After hundreds of years of civilization, people are still shooting at each other and engage in wars.



Emigre: So in terms of graphic design directions, we can't really expect anything truly new anymore?

Heek: Well, there are still a lot of people who haven't seen certain things. A lot of stuff is still new to them. But it's unimportant whether there will be truly new ways of visual communication. What really matters is what you say, not how you say it. And I think people are getting tired of all this overdesigned work. I know I am. All I need are a few well designed objects, household objects.

Emigre: What does "well designed" entail for you?

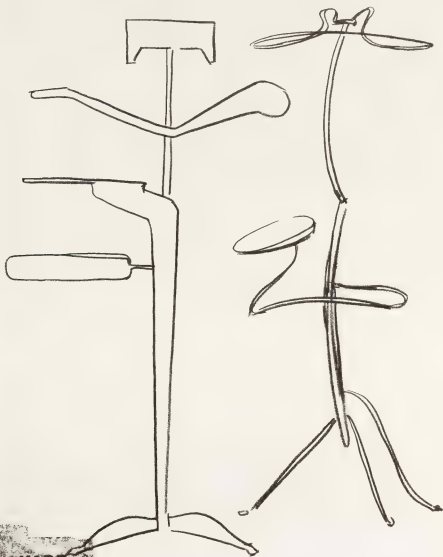
On the left
a drawing of a
chair. On the
right a drawing
of a lamp.



HARD
WERKEN

1993

Henk: First of all, when people talk about design nowadays, they talk about design as a novelty. There is designer clothing, designer food, designer cars. If something is designed, it doesn't necessarily mean that it's good! But for some reason, the word "design" has become synonymous with good. But how about bad designer clothing and bad designer food? There is so much of this "designer" stuff that is really bad. All I need are objects that work and don't fall apart after one month and look good and are affordable. Also, it has to be environmentally sound. You can't design things anymore that turn into unrecyclable trash.



**HARD
WERKEN**

Design Nirvana by: John Weber



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(The following article was originally a talk, presented as part of a symposium convened to coincide with a museum exhibit on design. As one of five graphic designers whose work was chosen to be exhibited and as a member of the symposium panel, Mr. Weber was asked to speak on anything he felt strongly about.)

"For this symposium I have decided to talk about the role of **rationalism vs. intuition** in the design process. It seems that rationalism gets a lot of the credit in this so-called "problem-solving" methodology, whereas I believe intuition should get more recognition.

What I soon discovered was that in analyzing how I approach design, I got all caught up in the anal-retentive, systematic thinking that I was rejecting. What I really want to say, to quote a more than familiar ad campaign slogan, is "Just do it!" But do it with feeling and intensity.

Design professors, critics and even many designers themselves seem to be very concerned about the "cognitive philosophical tangible gestalt-type thinking" that goes into design. Yes, designers do have to reason and think, but not every design decision is made on the premise that form follows function.

Design is not exact, and there is not always a definitive answer for every problem. Yet the bulk of what we read and hear about the design process gives the impression that designers are required to distill a problem down to its primary essence. Many designers are weaned on the principles of a teacher named Wucius Wong who believes: "Design is a process of purposeful visual creation. A good design is the best possible visual expression of the essence of "something," whether this be a message or a product." This theory suggests that there is only one possible rational solution to every design problem. Apparently upon reaching this solution, God puts his or her hand on the designer's shoulder and says, "Stop there, you have reached design Nirvana."

Hmmmm.

Maybe I don't know how to distill, because I've never felt any hands on my shoulders. It seems to me that there are an infinite number of solutions to a given design project; the goal, of course, is to be able to come up with one of the better ones. We hear about the design thought process, client needs, focus groups and marketing surveys, yet in the end the success or failure of a design is largely determined by how it looks. I don't care who the designer is or what type of design they're creating, there is a point in any project where there are arbitrary, intuitive and emotional decisions to be made. The designer still has to pick materials, colors, textures and the like. Whether you call these embellishments, or the "necessary additions to achieve symmetrical integrity," they are ultimately vital to the outcome of a project. But why is there the tendency to regard intuitive decisions as subordinate to the Almighty Process of Reasoning?

I think I know why.

For the most part, intuition is indefensible. It's an individual insight developed by experience, not learned from lectures or textbooks. In my own work, I seem to rely heavily on intuition, emotion and even serendipity for solutions. Then just for the fun of it, I concoct relatively lucid explanations to substantiate my decisions. And I know for a fact I'm not the only designer to employ this justification technique.

For instance, which sounds more impressive and logical? Rationalizing your decision to use green because it "symbolizes the monetary/sociological aspects of a liquid-asset society and because it is the complement of red, which is a primary color as is yellow" or saying, "I chose green because it looks good with orange"?

Is a rational response any better than an intuitive one? No, but I think this is what design analysis has lead us to believe. Perhaps we should take a moment to analyze the word "analysis." Simply looking at the word's structure reveals some telling signs. First of all, the root of the word is anal. Freud's psychoanalytic theory defines "anal" as an obsessive or unhealthy preoccupation or attachment. So, in essence, analysis is the unhealthy preoccupation of asking

why (y) something (s) is (is).

Maybe another reason intuition is regarded as subordinate to rationalism is our Western way of thinking. In a culture where the scientific method prevails as the ultimate truth, what credence can we give to the notion of knowing things without conscious reasoning? The very definition of science is the observation and classification of facts and the establishment of verifiable general rules.

It's no wonder we cling so tightly to design process theories, rationalizing our designs and categorizing who we are by what we do. Consequently we tend to see designers as specializing in one field of interest. I am often perplexed as to whether I should market myself as a graphic designer, a "computer" designer, an illustrator, or even a fine artist. It shouldn't make any difference what I call myself, but it does. If I decide to call myself an artist, artists are considered to be intuitive but sometimes to the point of being perceived as flaky. Let's face it: calling a designer's work "artsy" usually has a negative connotation. But if a design is an artistic one, is it less rational even if it solves the problem? Having a blind faith in rationalism seems ironic, considering intuition and serendipity have given rise to many scientific discoveries, inventions, and art.

We have to balance intuition and rationalism in how we think about design and realize that that balance is different for every designer, as well as for every project. Doesn't it seem ludicrous to put the same design constraints and expect the same thought process for, say, IBM and *Beach Culture* magazine? A designer has to approach a problem for a corporate client differently than they would for a bunch of California surfers.

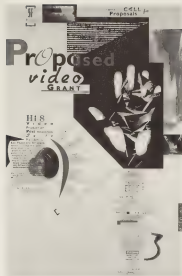
Don't they?

I think we talk about the design process in an effort to maximize success and minimize failure. In addition, it gives us a basis for understanding that we can then teach to others. As a result, what is more recognizable in a school curriculum, Design Principles in 2 Dimensions 101 or Serendipity 101?

Studying design may make you a better designer, while doing design and looking at the world with an eye for design will most definitely make you a better designer. I personally believe you have to feel design and let your individuality play an important role in how you approach problem-solving."

For me, design is part planning and part chaos.





John Fisher 1-1-1



1-1-1



John Fisher 1-1-1

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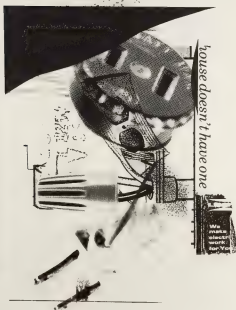
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Emigre Music Manifesto?

Since we started releasing music, we have been receiving dozens of telephone calls, each week, from people asking us what our music sounds like. Although we try our best, answering these questions remains difficult, if not impossible. Even when we advertise Emigre Music in our flyers, we can only draw vague comparisons to other music. Descriptions are even more difficult to make because our releases are varied and idiosyncratic. Graphic design is easy in that respect. You can describe the contents of an issue and show one or two small pictures of a cover or poster and most designers can decide from these whether the issue would be of interest to them. Music you have to hear first, or at least read a review in your favorite fanzine, or have a friend with identical musical taste tell you about a band, before you buy it.

Some people have told us that we should publish a manifesto about our music. Although we have considered this, due to the diverse nature of the music and musicians that we are interested in, we believe that a manifesto would constrain our output. However, there is a method to our madness. Actually, releasing music is a rather natural extension of our intentions with Emigre. The goal we have set with Emigre magazine, for instance, is to feature the work of graphic designers that we feel has been overlooked by the major design magazines and/or design competitions. Usually these are designers whose work does not conform to mainstream ideas or hasn't matured to the point of predictability. They are designers whose work is still developing. By publishing their work, we intend to help exhibit and explain it, and ultimately provide the graphic design world with a more complete picture of the state of graphic design. Our Emigre typefaces are released with similar intentions: to make available those typefaces that we believe will not be made available by the established type foundries. They are highly unusual typefaces that are nonetheless designed with a great deal of mastery and ones that could be useful to certain graphic designers.

When we announced that Emigre was planning to release music, we were deluged with demo tapes from artists all over the country. Although we expected quite a few submissions, we were amazed at how much really good, original music there was to choose from, and all unreleased! So far we have released those records that were sent to us practically finished—some had finished masters ready to be sent to the pressing plant. In most cases, that meant the record was entirely recorded by the artists themselves. According to musical engineers or professional producers, these might not be of the highest possible quality, but they sound the way they were supposed to sound according to the musicians. This is important to us. Whenever we invite a graphic designer to contribute to Emigre magazine whether it is a page design or an essay we usually do not edit the work that is submitted. Picking the artist is the editing, whether he or she is a graphic designer or musician.

Regarding our feelings about the music we have released, it is best to say that we hope to continue to contribute to the development of certain individual musical talents that we greatly admire. We intend to release their music with as little intervention from our side (the record label) as possible. The question remains: What does it sound like? All we can say is that although our taste in music is quite broad, most of the music will remain within fringes of pop.

Dear Emogr,

On "Wise Guys," *Emogr* #180:
Another terrific issue. Some of
Fella's and Schneider's work is pure
shit, but how to admit I enjoyed it
and even learned something.
Particularly Fella's work is at once
grotesque, but there's a perverse
attraction to it. I admire the
unabashedness of it all, revealing
mistakes and inequality all at once.
Charles Spencer Anderson has said
Emogr may well be the only design
magazine that makes designers
think as well as please the eye.
Zuzana Licko's typefaces are the
most refreshing I've seen in a long
time and I don't think right books is
too much spend on a magazine that
takes three days to read. How about
an issue on design education? You
could do a Yale/Cranbrook/Dart-
mouth survey, even recruit graduates
only, as instructors. It might prove
interesting. Keep up the good work!
Sincerely,
Ted Fabele, Atlanta, Georgia

Dear Emogr,

I like getting messages from you,
even when they tell me I won't be
getting Emogr as much. But it is not
as bad as that. I should have
mentioned you that I now have a
subscription with your Dutch
distribution. So I have the last two
issues.

Last week I met Piet Schreuders
and wanted to discuss Edward Fella with
him. But he hadn't read that piece
yet. The U.S. makes a very lively
typographic scene. Some it won't be
necessary any more to bring over
Dutch designers. Another few years
and American designers will be doing
this way. Take another ten years and
we will all come to you again (as in
1988). Typographic traffic. Looking
forward to the next issue and the
next typeface.
With very best wishes,
Berard Jinger, Houston

Dear Emogr,

Emogr magazine is a Godsend. I love
it. It is so nice to know that there are
other people out there who aren't
satisfied by just valuing graphic
design problems in the quickest,
safest manner. Kudos to your
magazine for featuring such
wonderful and inspiring people. You
know, I'm actually quite disappointed by
some of my fellow design student
classmates who keep themselves so
tightly closed to graphic design
and life in general. They are not
satisfied with getting by comfortably
and reveling in another mediocrity. It
gives them's nothing wrong with
that if you do it well, but it's nice to
have a journal like yours to give us a
more complete picture of graphic
design today. I would just like to
thank you wholeheartedly for your
wonderful contribution to our
culture. We need it, especially here
in Detroit. Have you heard what
Michigan's governor, John Engler is

doing to the cultural/arts
organizations in Michigan. He
is shutting them all down. Yikes!!
AAAAAhhhh!!
Remember: Only dead fish go with
the flow.
Thanks again,
Leo Villa, Detroit, Michigan

Dear Emogr,

Well, I bought Issue II, because I
was just beginning to get to grips
with the office Mac's basic
functions, and this magazine seemed
to be saying that the Mac could do
all sorts of wild stuff, a concept
which really appealed to me as a
magazine advocate's assistant
designer. I have stumbled literally
across a large stack of issues in the
Krugon Magazine. Besides doing last
summer. After making the move, I
brought the other back issues they
had, and began to understand the
ethos behind the magazine, as well
as appreciating the work featured.
Without quickly saying that it
changed my whole life, it is true to
say that my design sense has
certainly been reevaluated. Another
factor of influence at the time was
the excellent "American Graphic
Design" at the Design Museum,
London, which featured a great deal
of work which was new to me or I
had overlooked until then. Actually,
Emogr was featured in the exhibition
which gave me an opportunity to
"inspire" my friends with my
knowledge of contemporary
American design, but that is another
story.
Yours Faithfully,
Micha Warkh, England

Dear Emogr,

I never wanted to write this letter.
I can't explain simply why I journeyed
myself out to contact you, or why I'm
boasting that promise me, so I
won't explain simply.
Partly, it has to do with the fact that
I studied graphic design at the
Kansas City Art Institute (KCAI)
offered a dynamic environment for a
fine arts education, but the
leadership of the design department
was, at best, limited. I left school
with a deep dissatisfaction with
typography and, quite honestly,
typographers. For me, the entire
discipline had been reduced to a
narration of it's noble parents.
A typographer was not a devoted
individual, determined to bring
greater satisfaction to the act of
reading and looking, rather, he was
an effeminate, gay, man with small
round glasses who paraded on the
fringe points of the latest Haier
of Helvetica while stylishly sipping
his double martinis at an AIGA
celebrity party. I confess that such a
grotesque description is evidence of
my former ignorance of who
typographers are and what
typographers do.
However, my commitment to the

craft continues to grow, though I
remain emotionally detached from
so called typographic associations
and typographic professionals, with
one exception: your magazine. There
is a limit to what official graphic
design literature, periodicals, and
conferences can offer. I think you
will agree when I say that
typographers should constantly
investigate complementary activities
healing, painting, cooking, watching
television, reading fairy tales when
not actively engaged in a project.
Nevertheless, I remain vitally
devoted to your magazine.

I first encountered your work while
daring myself to thumb through the
back New American Design. I found
there, and in all of your work since
there, a responsiveness, coupled with a
fluent and entirely engaging
approach to graphic design. It was
exactly this divergent far conversation
that encouraged me to reevaluate my
own typographic assumptions. So far,
it's working.

Currently I am engaged in, if you'll
pardon the clumsy metaphor, a kind
of typographic guerrilla warfare in
the trenches of graphic design
activity — in other words, I am
teaching graphic design at numerous
junior colleges, business colleges
and "computer skill schools."

Drawing largely from your magazine
as an example, I am showing
screenwriters, technicians,
journalists, and other human
beings how to demythologize
typography. I have learned that must
grapple, with no previous education in
graphic design, suggest the existence
of graphic design face pay. These
suggestions lead to impressive
results. Now that general
technologies are within everyone's
reach, publishing houses find that
their end products lack that
"professional look" and they hastily
adopt prepackaged layouts and
solutions, while retaining a strong
distaste for their own visual decisions.
making. I remain committed to
abolishing people's reliance on these
stereotyped products.

It is in the spirit of this commitment
that I eagerly await each coming
issue of Emogr if only to remind
myself that typography works best
when it is the product of personal
opinion, desires, memories and
wisdom. Inevitably then, mystery
and intrigue become part of the
reader's experience. How you may
know why I have not written to you
before now. Part of my own
engagement comes from the fact that
I occasionally had this multifarious
magazine at the ones stand. I try not
to wonder how it gets there.
Once, when purchasing a copy at
Hakard Eye on Haight St., the clerk
said to me, "Yes, I know these guys,
they're friends of mine." "Well don't
tell me anything about them," I said,
and quickly left.
How close should someone get to

these role models, after all?
Before I close this letter, I would
like to compliment Elizabeth Duns
for her delightful typeface,
Marvelous... an act of play for some,
an act of courage for others. It
remains, for me, a beautiful example
of the innocence and playfulness that
type alone can express. And it was
just this playfulness that moved me
to write you and voice my enthusiasm
for what you continue to create.
Best,
Jim Emerson, San Francisco,
California

Dear Emogr,

In the last issue you designed
for National correspondence printed
by laser. There are other places that
I wish I could use it but I can't. I
wish you had included old-style
figures and a two story lower-case g.
If you do an "expert set," I'll buy it.
All the best
Ray Selinsky Oakland, California

Dear Emogr,

Okay, okay — old style figures for
journalism: right up! Actually
when we first introduced the idea of
including old style materials in the
March issue, regarding news coming
in far from home, Steve Journal
has a major league insight. It
seemed appropriate to drop the old
style figure idea. But now we have
as many requests for old style figures in
journal as we have requests for
using figures in journal.
Also, we will be releasing "Extended
Family" sort sets to accompany the
March, Journal and Typo families
later this year. These will include
small caps, tabular figures,
fractions, and extra goodness like
serifment. The tabular figures will
be using figures of equal set widths
for use in tables. Emogr's standard
figures have variable widths for
optimal legibility in text.
Zuzana Licko

Attention Journal users, if you have
bought a copy of Journal and would like
to upgrade your fonts with old style
figures, please send us your master disk
and we'll be happy to return it with the
updated files. Once all of the March,
Journal and Typo fonts include both the
old style and lining figures.

Dear Emogr,

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per gol der.

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San Francisco, CA
- Whisky
Beverly, CA

One word, two people.

Right on the heels of the critically acclaimed debut album *Play With Toys* by Basehead, Enrigo is eager to introduce Supercollider. This Los Angeles band band consists of two members, guitarist/vocalist Michael Harton and drummer Philip Hain. With only two people in the group, Supercollider couples live guitar and drums with sampled/sequenced sounds to make up the rest of their music. And while bands such as Jay Division/New Order, Talking Heads and Sonic Youth have shaped the group's sound, minimalist composers (Steve Reich, Philip Glass) and artists (Donald Judd, Ellsworth Kelly) are in a large way responsible for Supercollider's unique approach to alternative rock.

Compact disc: \$13.00; cassette: \$8.00 (Add \$2.50 Shipping and handling).



63 Original Typeface Designs Available Exclusively From Emigre

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new
release:

super collider.

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One word, two people.

Right on the heels of the critically acclaimed debut album *Play With Toys* by Builthead, Ensign is eager to introduce Supercollider. This Los Angeles based band consists of two members, guitarist/vocalist Michael Hartson and drummer Philip Hux. With only two people in the group, Supercollider couples live guitar and drums with sampled/synthesized sounds to make up the core of their music. And while bands such as Jay Drive/We New Order, Talking Heads and Sonic Youth have shaped the group's sound, minimalist composers (Steve Reich, Philip Glass) and artists (Donald Judd, Ellsworth Kelly) are in a large way responsible for Supercollider's unique approach to alternative rock.

Compact disc: \$13.00; cassette: \$8.00 (Add \$2.50 Shipping and handling).



the end